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Promotion and protection of human rights: human rights questions, including alternative approaches for improving the effective enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms

Strengthening the role of the United Nations in enhancing the effectiveness of the principle of periodic and genuine elections and the promotion of democratization

Report of the Secretary-General**

Summary

The present report describes the activities of the United Nations system in providing electoral assistance to Member States over the past two years. United Nations electoral assistance is provided only at the request of a Member State or on the basis of a resolution of the Security Council or the General Assembly. Over the past 20 years, the United Nations has provided electoral assistance to 104 Member States and 4 territories.

As the focal point for electoral assistance activities, the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs is responsible for ensuring organizational coherence as well as political and technical consistency in all United Nations activities. In these tasks, he is supported by the Electoral Assistance Division, which assists with the design and staffing of United Nations electoral activities, provides ongoing technical guidance and maintains both the roster of electoral experts and the Organization's electoral institutional memory.

* A/64/150.

** The present report was delayed owing to the need to reflect information provided by a variety of sources.

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In peacekeeping or post-conflict environments, electoral assistance is generally provided through components of field missions of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations or the Department of Political Affairs. The United Nations Development Programme is the Organization's major provider of technical assistance in the development context, as part of democratic governance programmes, and increasingly supports Security Council electoral mandates as part of integrated missions. A number of other United Nations departments, agencies, funds and programmes are also involved in the provision of electoral assistance, including the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the United Nations Democracy Fund, the United Nations Volunteers programme, the United Nations Development Fund for Women and the Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

The report indicates that the demand from Member States for United Nations electoral assistance remains high. During the reporting period, assistance was provided to 52 Member States, 8 of them on the basis of a Security Council mandate. Over the years, the United Nations has developed significant expertise in the provision of electoral assistance, including through its roster of electoral experts and its institutional memory. It has also developed a positive track record for effective delivery of electoral assistance, including in some of the most difficult post-conflict and geographical environments. Most importantly, given that elections are fundamentally political events, the Organization's impartiality remains its biggest asset.

The report highlights a number of positive trends, including the increasing number of Member States that are using elections as a peaceful means of discerning the will of the people, the growing capacity among newer democracies to administer credible elections, and increasing South-South cooperation among electoral administrators. At the same time, a number of challenges have emerged. These include the potential for elections to be overshadowed by political discord or violence, especially after results are announced; concerns regarding the cost of elections and sustainability; and, following the increase of actors involved in electoral assistance both inside and outside the United Nations, the need to ensure coordination and cohesion and safeguard United Nations impartiality.

The report makes a number of observations. These include the need to: make sustainability and cost-effectiveness more central in the design and provision of electoral assistance; consider additional measures to ensure that elections contribute to peace and good governance, rather than violence or instability; and increase the use of special or more flexible administrative procedures, with the necessary safeguards and controls, for electoral projects in a crisis situation or under a Security Council mandate. The report suggests reiteration of the role of the focal point to ensure United Nations coordination and consistency as well as appropriate relationships with regional and intergovernmental organizations, and notes that the United Nations must continue to support electoral programmes that facilitate the participation of women and seek to ensure the rights of minorities and marginalized groups.

The report concludes by recalling that while elections are technical processes, they are fundamentally political events. However, the true measure of an election is whether it engenders broad public confidence in the process and trust in the outcome. An election run honestly and transparently, respecting basic rights, with effective and neutral support of State institutions, and responsible conduct of participants (leaders, candidates, and voters) is most likely to achieve an accepted and peaceful outcome.

I. Introduction

1. The present report has been prepared in conformity with General Assembly resolution 62/150 and covers electoral activities undertaken by the United Nations since the previous report on this subject (A/62/293).

2. The United Nations has been involved in providing electoral assistance since its foundation. In the early years, this included promoting the principle of self-determination through the observation and supervision of elections held in the context of decolonization processes. In more recent years, it has focused on seeking to strengthen national institutional capacities in a sustainable manner with due consideration to the legal, political, social, economic and cultural conditions and contexts, and supporting Member States to conduct credible elections in accordance with the principles outlined in international human rights instruments.

3. This was affirmed in General Assembly resolution 46/137, through reference to article 21 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which provides that "the will of the people shall be the basis of authority of government [and that] this will shall be expressed in periodic and genuine elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret vote or by equivalent free voting procedures". The same resolution makes reference to similar principles contained in article 25 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which establishes that every citizen shall have the right "to vote and to be elected at genuine periodic elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage ... guaranteeing the free expression of the will of the electors".

4. United Nations electoral assistance is provided only at the request of Member States, in conformity with the principle of the sovereign equality of States and the realization that there is no single electoral methodology or system that is appropriate for all countries. In the last 20 years, the United Nations has provided electoral assistance to 104 Member States and 4 territories. During the reporting period, the United Nations provided electoral assistance to 52 Member States. Selected examples of electoral assistance are listed in annex I to the present report. A full list of countries and territories to which assistance has been provided during the reporting period is contained in annex II.

5. In his report to the fifty-eighth General Assembly (A/58/212), then-Secretary-General Kofi Annan summarized United Nations electoral assistance into four categories: (a) technical assistance; (b) the organization and conduct of elections; (c) observation or monitoring of elections; and (d) support where elections are expected to play a significant role in the peacebuilding phase of political negotiations. Today, most United Nations electoral support takes the form of technical assistance and capacity-building as well as occasionally targeted support to peacebuilding or political negotiations. The organization of elections remains exceptional. The United Nations now rarely observes elections; in contrast, many regional organizations are prioritizing this activity.

6. In recent years, electoral assistance has become more complex. Requests from Member States have tended to become more focused on highly specialized areas such as voter registration, electoral legislation reform and training of electoral officials. At the same time, there has been an increase in the number of donors and electoral assistance providers, adding both specialized technical knowledge as well as challenges to coordination among multiple actors.

7. The present report summarizes the work of the United Nations departments, programmes and agencies involved in the provision of electoral assistance during the reporting period, discusses cooperation within and outside the United Nations system and considers key trends and challenges. Finally, it makes a number of observations aimed at strengthening the provision of electoral assistance by the United Nations system.

II. United Nations electoral assistance during the reporting period

A. Mandates and activities

8. United Nations assistance to Member States in conducting credible, periodic and genuine elections continues to be a system-wide endeavour. The United Nations institutional framework benefits from relatively clear mandates from the General Assembly.

9. The Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs is the United Nations focal point for electoral assistance activities (hereafter the focal point), with a mandate under resolution 46/137 to ensure organizational coherence and political and technical consistency in all United Nations electoral activities. The importance of the focal point's role in ensuring United Nations coordination in developing and disseminating electoral policies and in strengthening the Organization's electoral institutional memory was reiterated in General Assembly resolution 62/150.

10. The focal point is supported in these functions by the Electoral Assistance Division, which is also tasked by the General Assembly with maintaining a geographically diverse roster of qualified international electoral experts who can provide technical assistance as well as assist in electoral processes. The Division assists with the design and staffing of all United Nations electoral projects and with ongoing technical guidance as required on behalf of the United Nations focal point.

11. In peacekeeping or post-conflict environments, electoral assistance is generally provided through components of field missions under the aegis of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations or the Department of Political Affairs. During the reporting period, eight Member States received electoral assistance on the basis of a Security Council mandate.

12. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is the Organization's major implementing body for long-term electoral support outside the peacekeeping or post-conflict context. In its resolution 62/150, the General Assembly reiterated the importance of democratic governance assistance programmes of UNDP, in particular those that strengthen democratic institutions and linkages between civil society and Governments. Electoral assistance is provided by UNDP to an average of 30 countries a year, roughly half of which are in Africa. With the trend towards integrated United Nations efforts, UNDP is increasingly providing support to electoral assistance mandates undertaken by field missions under the aegis of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations or the Department of Political Affairs.

13. Other United Nations departments, agencies, funds and programmes are also involved in electoral assistance, including the United Nations Democracy Fund, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the

United Nations Volunteers programme, the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), the United Nations Office of Project Services (UNOPS) and the Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

14. Since its establishment in 2005, the United Nations Democracy Fund has supported 204 projects, primarily run by non-governmental organizations, to strengthen civil society, promote human rights and encourage participation in the democratic process in 136 countries around the world. Twenty of the projects were in the area of electoral assistance. This serves to complement the United Nations support to Governments to strengthen democratic institutions. In addition, the United Nations Democracy Fund has also provided support to a number of major global and regional democracy projects, including the ACE Electoral Knowledge Network. So far contributions of close to $100 million have been received from over 35 countries, and a further 69 projects were recently approved by me in the third funding round.

15. OHCHR continues to provide advice on human rights aspects of elections. This has included the preparation of guidelines for analysis of electoral laws, implementation of public information activities and the provision of technical assistance. For example, at the request of the Government of Togo, OHCHR monitored the human rights situation throughout the country before, during and after the October 2007 legislative elections, using a human rights-based methodology involving national observers from civil society. This helped to contribute to a peaceful electoral atmosphere.

16. The United Nations Volunteers programme provides support to United Nations field operations, deploying over 1,000 volunteers to 24 electoral operations in collaboration with the Department of Political Affairs, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and UNDP during the biennium. As of June 2009, nearly 400 volunteers were working in 16 countries, including Afghanistan, Côte d'Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Sudan and Timor-Leste, providing advice to local electoral authorities, and helping with voter registration and civic education at the community level.

17. UNIFEM provides technical expertise to numerous United Nations projects and programmes with a view to ensuring that gender equality and women's participation receive adequate attention. This input has, for example, supported the design of gender-responsive electoral laws in Indonesia and strengthened the capacity of women to contest in countries such as Ecuador, Indonesia, Nepal and Rwanda. UNIFEM has also convened South-South exchanges for women's organizations and candidates from a number of African countries, to enable them to learn skills for more effective engagement with the electoral process.

18. During the biennium, UNOPS provided support to electoral activities in partnership with the Department of Political Affairs, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, UNDP and Member States. This included capacity-building support to the election commission in Afghanistan in the areas of logistics, administration, security and operations, and to the election commission in Iraq in the areas of voter education and communications. Support was also provided to domestic observers in Iraq. Other assistance included the rehabilitation of the national archives in Côte d'Ivoire in advance of the voter registration process.

B. Cooperation and coordination within the United Nations system

19. In the previous report (A/62/293), the wide range of United Nations actors and the importance of coordination and consistency in electoral assistance activities were noted. In its resolution 62/150, the General Assembly reiterated the importance of reinforced coordination and reaffirmed the role of the focal point in ensuring system-wide coherence, including by strengthening institutional memory and the development and dissemination of electoral policies.

20. To foster greater system-wide coherence and consistency, a coordination mechanism has been established under the auspices of the focal point to bring together relevant United Nations departments, agencies and programmes involved in electoral assistance. This aims to encourage more systematic exchange of information, the improved harmonization of activities, a more intensive policy dialogue, the adoption of common positions on policy and issues of common concern, and the promotion of stronger partnerships within the United Nations system. The Department of Political Affairs and UNDP are also discussing revision of the joint note of guidance on electoral assistance issued in 2001 by the focal point and the UNDP Administrator (A/56/344, annex II), which outlines roles and responsibilities, to take account of developments and lessons learned over the past eight years.

21. Joint guidelines on enhancing the role of women in post-conflict electoral processes, prepared by the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the Department of Field Support in cooperation with the Electoral Assistance Division of the Department of Political Affairs, were published in October 2007. The guidelines, which were formulated on the basis of findings from national civil society consultations, provide advice on measures to increase the participation of women as voters, candidates and administrators and to help to ensure that the elections have an equal impact on women and men. The guidelines are designed to assist United Nations personnel to implement obligations under Security Council resolution 1325 (2000). The guidelines will be reviewed and revised in late 2009, and distributed widely within the United Nations system and to Member States.

C. Cooperation with other organizations

22. In the reporting period, the United Nations has continued to enhance cooperation with other international, governmental and non-governmental organizations, both in the field and at the headquarters level, with a view to strengthening the delivery of electoral assistance.

23. The increasing multiplicity of assistance providers outside the United Nations system has enriched the knowledge pool and opened new opportunities, including for greater South-South cooperation. For example, respected members of election management bodies, such as those in Ghana and South Africa, are being asked to assist election administrators elsewhere on the African continent and around the world. The Mexican election commission, which once received substantial support from the United Nations, now regularly acts as a provider of training to other electoral management bodies. The United Nations often supports and facilitates these exchanges. At the same time, multiple electoral assistance providers have also

created coordination challenges and, in some contexts, competition for increasingly substantial donor funding.

24. The United Nations continues to be a partner in two global electoral knowledge tools, the ACE Electoral Knowledge Network and the Building Resources in Democracy, Governance and Elections (BRIDGE) project. The ACE Electoral Knowledge Network includes International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA), Elections Canada, the Electoral Institute of Southern Africa (EISA), Instituto Federal Electoral — Mexico, the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), UNDP, the Electoral Assistance Division, and the Department of Economic and Social Affairs. ACE provides comprehensive and authoritative information on elections, promotes networking among election-related professionals and offers capacity development services. An evaluation of ACE conducted in 2009 will define its vision and strategic objectives in the coming years. The second electoral knowledge tool, BRIDGE, is a partnership of the Australian Electoral Commission, International IDEA, IFES, the Electoral Assistance Division and UNDP. The purpose of the partnership is to develop, implement and maintain a comprehensive curriculum on effective administration of electoral processes, and provide modular training packages for electoral management bodies. During the reporting period, a newly revised and expanded version of BRIDGE was prepared by election experts from various regions, which will be translated into various languages for widespread use.

25. The United Nations, through UNIFEM and UNDP, is also a partner in the International Knowledge Network of Women in Politics (iKNOW), an innovative global platform that uses the exchange of information and networking to promote women's increased role and presence in political processes around the world. The network, which also includes International IDEA, the Inter-Parliamentary Union and the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs, features over 100 experts on women and politics and an online resource library with over 400 reports, handbooks and training materials on a wide range of electoral issues.

26. The United Nations continues to work on electoral issues in collaboration with regional intergovernmental organizations such as the African Union, the European Union, the Organization of American States (OAS) and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), including through dialogue on programmes of common interest and exchange of information and best practices.

27. During the reporting period, the Electoral Assistance Division has continued to provide capacity-building support to the Democracy and Electoral Assistance Unit of the African Union Commission, including in the establishment of a database of election experts, support for institutional memory, dissemination of best practices and management of electoral assistance funds. The Electoral Assistance Division also provided support to the Southern African Development Community in strengthening its logistical and technical arrangements for election observation. Following the violent aftermath of the 2007 elections, the Department of Political Affairs and UNDP supported the African Union-mandated Panel of Eminent African Personalities in facilitating a solution to the 2007 post-electoral crisis in Kenya. The Electoral Assistance Division provided expert advice throughout the African Union mediation efforts and assisted in the design and establishment of the Independent Review Commission.

28. UNDP continues to deliver a significant part of its electoral assistance activities within the formal framework of a partnership with the European Commission, for which operational guidelines were agreed in April 2006. During the reporting period, the partnership, supported by a Task Force based in Brussels, conducted five joint trainings of European Commission and UNDP country staff to improve their skills in delivering assistance and mobilized resources for 30 electoral assistance projects.

29. The Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation, which was commemorated at United Nations Headquarters in October 2005, and mentioned in my previous report (A/62/293), aims to harmonize the methods and standards of the many intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations engaged in observing elections. During the reporting period, the total number of signatories rose to more than 30, representing the vast majority of recognized and respected actors in the field. I encourage others to join the emerging consensus regarding these principles.

III. United Nations resources for electoral assistance

30. Significant funds have been allocated to United Nations electoral assistance projects around the world. The cost of electoral components in field missions are covered by assessed contributions for the particular missions, while the majority of resources for UNDP electoral assistance projects are leveraged in the field through the contributions of Member States.

31. In its resolution 63/261 on strengthening of the Department of Political Affairs, the General Assembly approved a total of eight new posts (5 Professional and 3 General Service) and one post reclassification for the Electoral Assistance Division. These additions will strengthen the ability of the Department of Political Affairs to respond more quickly and effectively to the requests of Member States and to assure greater coordination and coherence of United Nations electoral assistance.

32. During the reporting period, the Electoral Assistance Division, in line with a recommendation of the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS), gave priority to converting its roster into an electronic format, implementing its roster procedures within the Nucleus/Galaxy application framework. This will enhance efficiency and transparency in the selection of experts and foster geographic and gender diversity, while assuring that the roster remains fully integrated into the Organization's broader plans for human resources management reforms. However, the Division has some concerns as to whether the new recruitment system will be able to meet the tight electoral timelines for deployment of qualified staff to critical electoral field missions, in particular large-scale, Security Council-mandated operations and rapid-response UNDP electoral country projects. The Division has also strengthened its institutional memory by streamlining document processing, developing a specific software tool that functions as a document library for reference and storage of documents.

33. The United Nations continues to pursue gender balance in the staffing of its field missions. Some electoral missions have almost achieved a gender balance among their staff, and the United Nations Chief Electoral Officers in seven key country electoral projects (United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI),

UNDP-Elect in Afghanistan, UNDP electoral projects in Honduras, Indonesia, Lebanon and Yemen and the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire certification cell) are female. At the same time, the representation of women on the electoral expert roster has remained at 30 per cent, a figure that also reflects the number of female applicants, indicating that additional efforts are necessary in this area.

34. The Department of Political Affairs Trust Fund for electoral assistance and the UNDP Democratic Governance Thematic Trust Fund remain important sources of critical extrabudgetary funding for electoral assistance activities. Such funds allow the implementation of rapid response, innovative or catalytic projects and programmes, including those that support the participation of women and vulnerable groups. In mid-2009, UNDP launched the Global Programme on Electoral Cycles Support, which will provide assistance over the next three years to countries implementing electoral cycle initiatives to strengthen electoral institutions and processes. This initiative is directly executed by the UNDP Bureau for Policy Development, and the Programme Management Team is based in Brussels. The Government of Spain is the lead donor.

IV. Conflict prevention

35. In my previous report, I noted the potential for elections to be overshadowed by political discord or violence, especially after results are announced, or during efforts to form a government. Regrettably, events during the reporting period in a number of countries, demonstrated again the potential for elections to trigger events which divide, rather than unify.

36. Electoral shortcomings — such as severely flawed voter lists, the misuse of incumbency, a lack of transparency and the bias of election officials — can lead to violent reactions to real or perceived fraud. However, most often these shortcomings are not the cause, but the spark to ignite deeper rooted social, economic or political tensions. If underlying political conditions are not conducive to confidence among stakeholders, elections can be a trigger for conflict.

37. The United Nations has taken specific measures to prevent or mitigate conflict related to elections. During the reporting period, I dispatched a high-level panel of electoral experts to assist in the exercise of my good offices during the conduct of elections in Bangladesh, Maldives and Mauritania. In all three cases, the work of the United Nations complemented that of international and domestic observers, contributing to an increased level of confidence in the electoral process and the eventual acceptance of results and peaceful completion of the elections.

38. It remains crucial to ensure that the voices of women, minorities and marginalized groups influence post-conflict discussions on electoral system reform. This approach has led to the adoption of special measures such as quotas which have, for example, increased female parliamentary representation in Afghanistan and Burundi, and helped to ensure a linguistically and ethnically diverse constitutional assembly in Nepal.

V. Sustainability

39. Elections are expensive, regardless of the way in which they are conducted. But some processes are more costly per voter than others; and some of the poorest countries in the world have chosen some of the most expensive electoral processes and technology. While the choice of electoral system and process is of course the sovereign right of Member States, I am concerned about techniques and systems that might cause a State, in the conduct of its own elections, to be financially dependent on donors, or technologically dependent on specific vendors, for extended periods.

40. I also encourage Member States, donors and assistance providers to consider the cost of election processes within the context of other development priorities, in particular the Millennium Development Goals. Well-run elections are a crucial investment, but experience throughout the world has shown that it is not the case that the more complex or expensive a system, the more successful the elections will be.

41. There is increasing understanding that electoral assistance should be available, if requested and required, throughout the entire electoral cycle, meaning before and after elections. The aim of this "electoral-cycle approach" is to secure needed resources and expertise to support effective planning and institution-building between electoral events. It should therefore hasten sustainability, and decrease the time frames for long-term United Nations support. The approach must continue to be solidly based on a needs assessment, and be subject to clear sustainability criteria and monitoring and evaluation tools.

VI. Observations

42. A number of positive trends have been identified in recent years. Most significantly, an increasing number of Member States are using elections as a peaceful means of discerning the will of the people, which builds confidence in representative government and enhances peace and stability. I am also encouraged by the growing capacity among newer democracies to administer credible elections.

43. Demand from Member States for United Nations electoral assistance continues to be high. During the reporting period, almost one quarter of Member States have requested, and received, some form of electoral support. This is an indication of the general appreciation of the work of the United Nations in supporting credible, periodic and genuine elections. I will continue to work with Member States to ensure timely support to electoral assistance as requested.

44. Over the years, the United Nations has developed significant expertise in the provision of electoral assistance, including through its roster of electoral experts and its institutional memory. It has also developed a positive track record for effective support, including in very challenging environments. Most importantly, given that elections are fundamentally a political event, the Organization's impartiality remains perhaps its most valuable asset. This must continue to be scrupulously safeguarded. The United Nations system will uphold these three principles — expertise, effectiveness and impartiality — as we provide electoral assistance.

45. The multiplicity of actors involved in electoral assistance within the United Nations system remains a strength. The newly established Inter-Agency Coordinating Mechanism for United Nations Electoral Assistance (ICMEA), chaired

by the Department of Political Affairs, will be essential in facilitating communication and cooperation among United Nations departments, agencies, funds and programmes. However, pressures from within and outside the system can create incentive for disharmony and overlap. I therefore encourage Member States to reaffirm the role of the United Nations focal point in ensuring coherent and consistent electoral practices and policies.

46. Multiple electoral assistance providers outside the United Nations and increased competition for donor financing have increased coordination challenges. I encourage Member States to reiterate the role of the focal point, articulated in General Assembly resolution 46/137, to ensure appropriate working relationships with regional and intergovernmental organizations and the avoidance of duplication of efforts.

47. As noted in previous reports, the Organization must continue to support programmes that facilitate the participation of women in electoral processes and encourage systems that seek to safeguard the rights of minorities and marginalized groups.

48. The United Nations has made progress towards more efficient and harmonized administrative processes. However, tight electoral time frames, particularly in the peacekeeping or peacebuilding contexts, remain a consistent challenge for the Organization's recruitment, procurement and funding mechanisms. This is particularly complicated in the context of integrated missions. While the longer-term answer is greater system-wide coherence, in the near term, the creation or increased use of special or more flexible procedures, in particular for procurement and recruitment of staff, with necessary safeguards and controls, should be considered for electoral projects in a crisis situation or under a Security Council mandate. In this regard, use of the roster of electoral experts should be encouraged for all United Nations electoral projects.

49. For electoral assistance under Security Council mandates, the Security Council should consider stating clearly its expectations regarding coordination with other assistance providers. Subject to the wishes of the Member State, a clear indication that the United Nations should have the lead role in ensuring coordination among assistance providers would help to avoid duplication of efforts, maximize cost-effectiveness and help to ensure the clear accountability of United Nations field missions to the Council.

50. In the light of the potential, in certain contexts, for elections to exacerbate existing tensions or fuel new conflict, we need to seek additional ways to ensure that elections contribute to peace and good governance, rather than act as a trigger for violence or instability. In the same vein, we should repudiate unconstitutional change of leadership as well as any attempt to undermine the will of the people through electoral malfeasance. I will continue to use my good offices to encourage the peaceful conduct of elections, including by supporting the efforts of regional organizations. We will also continue the practice of deploying electoral experts during political processes to provide necessary guidance on the political implications of electoral systems and realistic timelines.

51. Given the increasing need for rapid response in the prevention of election-related conflict, as well as targeted and specialized elections-related programmes, I encourage Member States to consider making voluntary contributions for electoral

assistance to the Trust Fund for Electoral Assistance, the Democratic Governance Thematic Trust Fund and the United Nations Democracy Fund.

52. Especially during a time of global economic downturn, sustainability and cost-effectiveness must become a more central consideration in the design and provision of electoral assistance, whether by the United Nations or by other bodies. I call upon Member States and donors to continue to consider carefully the cost of elections in the light of other pressing developmental needs, including the Millennium Development Goals.

53. It is important to emphasize that while elections are technical processes, they are fundamentally political events. The technical quality of an election is important, in particular insofar as it furthers and protects fundamental political and human rights. However, the true measure of an election is whether it engenders broad public confidence in the process and trust in the outcome. An election run honestly and transparently, respecting basic rights, with the effective and neutral support of State institutions, and responsible conduct of participants (leaders, candidates and voters) is most likely to achieve an accepted and peaceful outcome.

Annex I

Examples of United Nations electoral assistance during the reporting period

Afghanistan

1. Afghanistan will hold presidential and provincial elections in 2009, followed by parliamentary and local elections in the summer of 2010. While the last elections in 2005 were co-organized by the United Nations and the Afghan Government, the 2009 elections will be the first in more than 30 years to be fully organized by Afghan institutions. The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) has been mandated by the Security Council, and requested by President Karzai, to take the lead in the coordination of international electoral assistance. A technical assistance project, managed by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), has been put in place to assist the Independent Election Commission and other electoral stakeholders.

2. The UNDP project, which is being implemented by some 120 international experts deployed throughout the country, includes assistance in updating of the voter register, which was successfully achieved between October 2008 and February 2009, as well as support to a wide range of other electoral activities, including the creation of an Election Complaints Commission and Media Commission. Other elements include support for domestic observation groups, media monitoring and police training. The United Nations Development Fund for Women has supported dialogue between women members of parliament and the Independent Election Commission aimed at ensuring that women's concerns about the electoral process are heard and addressed adequately. The cost of this electoral cycle, including the update of the voter register and four elections, could be as high as $500 million.

Bangladesh

3. Following significant engagement by the United Nations starting in autumn 2006, the Secretary-General deployed a High-level Panel to Bangladesh to encourage the peaceful and credible conduct of parliamentary elections held in December 2008. The Panel made two visits, one in November prior to the lifting of the state of emergency, and one during the election period in December. During the visits, the Panel sought the views of a wide range of election stakeholders including state and electoral authorities and key political party leaders, and was widely seen to have made an important contribution to the peaceful conduct of the elections.

4. UNDP provided significant assistance to the Bangladesh Election Commission, including through the strengthening of administrative systems and information technology, training of election officials and preparation of a new voter register containing photographs of voters. As a result of this project, over 81 million people were registered in a span of just 11 months, from August 2007 to July 2008. UNDP also provided support to the reform of election legislation and delimitation of electoral constituencies.

Plurinational State of Bolivia

5. The Plurinational State of Bolivia is preparing for general elections in December 2009 and departmental elections in April 2010. Late in 2008, the

Government endorsed a request from the National Electoral Court for United Nations technical assistance. Following a needs assessment mission by the Electoral Assistance Division in spring 2009, a UNDP-led project was developed to provide short- and long-term technical support. Short-term activities include assistance to the National Electoral Court with out-of-country voting, special indigenous boundary delimitation and mechanisms to promote transparency. The longer-term activities will focus on capacity-building for Bolivian electoral institutions.

Côte d'Ivoire

6. The United Nations continues to provide technical, material and logistical support to the Independent Electoral Commission in preparation for upcoming presidential and parliamentary elections. A comprehensive identification and registration process for the general population and voters was completed on 30 June 2009. The first round of presidential elections is scheduled for November 2009. In line with a mandate provided by the Security Council, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General in Côte d'Ivoire is mandated to certify that all stages of the electoral process provide the necessary guarantees for holding open, free, fair and transparent presidential and legislative elections. This will be conducted using a framework established in consultation with national and international partners.

Democratic Republic of the Congo

7. The United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC) Electoral Division, together with the UNDP-managed *Project d'appui au cycle électoral en République Démocratique du Congo* (APEC), continued to support the Congolese Independent Electoral Commission in a number of electoral activities, with a focus on the local elections, scheduled to be held in late 2009. Voter registration began in June 2009 in Kinshasa and has since been extended to other parts of the country.

8. The local elections are an essential element in the consolidation of democracy and devolution of power to subnational administrations. They are also an important element in strengthening the capacity of the election commission prior to the 2011 general elections, when the involvement of MONUC in electoral assistance is likely to be greatly reduced and transferred to the UNDP country office. While the organization of elections in the Democratic Republic of the Congo will always pose a huge operational burden, it is hoped that the local election can be used by the election commission as an opportunity to explore Congolese solutions for the country's electoral challenges.

Guinea-Bissau

9. Following a request from the Prime Minister and approval by the United Nations focal point, UNDP developed a technical assistance project in 2008 to assist the electoral authorities with voter registration and the organization of legislative elections scheduled to be held in 2008 and presidential elections scheduled for 2010. Based on a further request, the United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office in Guinea-Bissau (UNOGBIS) established a small team to coordinate election observation by international observer missions. Although delayed when held on 16 November 2008, the parliamentary elections passed off successfully. Following the assassination of President Vieira in March 2009, the United Nations was

requested to assist with the organization of early presidential elections. In a matter of weeks, UNDP established a new electoral assistance team to help the electoral authorities, and UNOGBIS set up a new team to support the coordination of observers. Both rounds of the elections, on 28 June and 26 July, were completed peacefully.

Honduras

10. Honduras held primary elections in November 2008, and general elections are planned for November 2009. In order to prepare for both elections, the United Nations country team requested the Electoral Assistance Division to conduct an advisory mission in 2007 in order to identify possible areas for electoral assistance. Based on a later request from the Supreme Electoral Tribunal, the Division conducted a needs assessment mission in late 2007 and provided UNDP with additional suggestions regarding appropriate United Nations electoral support. The resulting UNDP project focuses on capacity-building for the Tribunal and assisting the Government in coordinating international electoral assistance.

Indonesia

11. UNDP is currently providing electoral assistance to Indonesia through a three-year, $17 million, multi-donor programme. This has two primary components, both of which are designed to enhance and consolidate the capacity of the National Elections Commission (KPU). The first of these was the provision of short-term assistance, advisory services and operational support for KPU in its preparations for and conduct of the 2009 legislative and presidential elections. The second component began as the 2009 electoral process was finalized and will continue through 2010. This focuses on reviewing the administrative lessons learned from the 2009 elections and translating these lessons into effective follow-up and institutional change.

12. UNDP has provided support and capacity-building for Indonesia's electoral commission over a number of years, tailoring successive programmes to meet the changing needs of KPU over time. The extent and complexity of assistance therefore increased and decreased as warranted by the electoral requirements at the time. As the current programme draws to a close, consideration will be given to further assistance that may be requested.

Iraq

13. The Iraqi Parliament appointed the members of the Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC) in May 2007. Since then the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI), a special political mission operating under a Security Council mandate, has continued to assist, support and advise IHEC and the Government of Iraq on electoral processes. The United Nations leads a team of international election experts that provide technical and policy advice as well as work to build the capacity of Iraq's electoral institutions. UNAMI partner organizations include UNDP, the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS), the European Union, the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs, the International Foundation for Electoral Systems, and an Italian non-governmental organization, Scuola Superiore Sant' Anna.

14. The governorate council elections in January 2009 were the first real test of IHEC in implementing a large-scale nationwide election event. These elections, also the first funded by the Iraqi Government since the end of the transitional period, were deemed a widespread success. Other 2009 election activities include presidential and parliamentary elections in the Kurdistan region and a national voter registration exercise to update the voter list. IHEC, with continued United Nations support, will conduct nationwide parliamentary elections in January 2010 followed by district and subdistrict elections later in the year.

Kenya

15. Kenya's presidential elections of 27 December 2007 were the most tightly contested in its history and were followed by a wave of violence across the country. However, following mediation efforts by former United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan, Chair of the African Union Panel of Eminent Personalities, President Mwai Kibaki and Prime Minister Raila Odinga signed the Agreement on the Principles of Partnership of the Coalition Government, on 28 February 2008.

16. The Department of Political Affairs and UNDP supported the Panel of Eminent African Personalities throughout the mediation process. The Electoral Assistance Division provided expert advice, including on the design and establishment of the Independent Review Commission (IREC), which was mandated to inquire into all aspects of the 2007 general elections, with particular emphasis on the presidential election. IREC presented its report in September 2008, which contained recommendations on the entire electoral process, triggering intense discussions on the need for urgent electoral reforms. The Government of Kenya is in the process of implementing these reforms and the United Nations will, upon request, continue to provide technical support to the Kenyan institutions involved in the electoral reform process.

Nepal

17. Established in 2007, the United Nations Mission in Nepal (UNMIN) provided the country's Election Commission with technical assistance in planning, preparing and conducting the Constituent Assembly elections. These were the first to be held after 10 years of conflict and resulted in the establishment of a 601-seat Constituent Assembly, tasked with drafting a new constitution by May 2010.

18. United Nations technical assistance included the deployment of 19 international technical advisers, who assisted at the regional and national levels with legal issues, operational planning, civic and voter education, training and logistics. Seventy United Nations Volunteers served as District Electoral Advisers throughout the country.

19. At the request of the parties to the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, the United Nations also created an Electoral Expert Monitoring Team of five senior electoral experts appointed by the Secretary-General. During periodic visits between June 2007 and April 2008, the team reviewed technical preparations for the elections and met with a wide range of election stakeholders, including women and traditionally marginalized groups. They also reviewed the conduct of election day activities. The Secretary-General shared the team's periodic reports with the Election Commission and the Government of Nepal.

Annex II

Countries and territories receiving United Nations electoral assistance during the reporting period

Afghanistan*

Algeria

Bangladesh

Bhutan

Plurinational State of Bolivia

Cambodia

Cameroon

Cape Verde

Chad

Congo

Côte d'Ivoire*

Democratic Republic of the Congo*

Ethiopia

Guinea

Guinea-Bissau

Guyana

Haiti*

Honduras

Indonesia

Iraq*

Kenya

Lebanon

Liberia

Madagascar

Malawi

Maldives

Mauritania

Marshall Islands

Mexico

Mozambique

Nepal*

Netherlands Antilles (Curacao)

New Zealand (Tokelau)

Niger

Nigeria

Occupied Palestinian Territory

Pakistan

Panama

Peru

Republic of Moldova

Romania

Rwanda

Sierra Leone

Sudan*

Suriname

Timor-Leste*

Togo

Turkmenistan

United Republic of Tanzania

Yemen

Zambia

* Receiving United Nations electoral assistance on the basis of a Security Council mandate.